Circular Letter #82

November 30,1928

Subject matter for composition work
in English and Spanish Classes.

GOVERNMENT OF PORTO RICO

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER

SAN JUAN

ADDRESS ALL OFFICIAL COMMUNICATIONS TO THE COMMISSIONER OF EDUCATION SAN JUAN, P. R.

November 30, 1928.

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Subject: SUBJECT MATTER FOR COMPOSITION WORK IN ENGLISH AND SPANISH CLASSES.

Supervisors of Schools,
High School Principals,
Teachers of High School English, and
Teachers of High School Spanish.

In order to keep language study in the realm of reality and usableness for our students, it is necessary to present it to them in connection with situations that the students find themselves facing in their own life. A language is taught best in connection with subject matter that bears a direct relation to the student; after the language is mastered the field of the subject matter may be widened to include topics of less direct bearing. In other words, language work is most effective when the subject matter is valuable.

The teaching of composition offers great opportunities for getting across to the students a body of new ideas; while the matter deserving first attention always is language, yet it is to be remembered that the composition class may be converted into something resembling an open Forum - a medium for getting to the student information that is highly valuable to him. For our own particular situation here the matter of first importance to the student is the gaining of information about Porto Rico and the situation that will confront him when he leaves school. Recent experiences have shown the utter ridiculousness of giving students training which supposedly approximates some hypothetical situation somewhere which most likely exists nowhere; hence the many changes of courses of study which we are undergoing. To face honestly the situation here in Porto Rico means that we must acquaint the student with the problems he shall have to face when he leaves his school. To follow traditional lines that furnish the supposed literary preparation for professional careers is, as we have been told many times, the height of folly.

Obviously, a corollary to the proposition that composition should deal with the immediate situation here, is, that subjects for composition work should not be drawn from the literature studied in class except in rare instances. The necessity for separating the two appears from what has been said above. The

required composition for each grade should not be used for the purpose of finding out what the student knows about the literature studied; tests and oral discussion should be used to determine if the student understands what he reads.

Nothing can be of more value to the student than a knowledge of how to get the necessary preparation to meet the economic situation than must inevitably confront him in the future. Therefore, let us take advantage of the opportunities afforded us in composition work both oral and written to give the students information on the conditions that surround them; much of this material can be gained from observation and much must be supplied by information given by the teacher. The general purpose of this work shall be

1) to inspire in him a respect for work of all kinds,

2) to acquaint the student with the resources that lie about him, and

3) to teach him how to take advantage of the available resources.

This work should be graduated in difficulty from the earlier grades to the highest. The first efforts may be concerned with short descriptions of the work done in the various occupations, the materials used, the advantages of each, the necessity of skill the good qualities developed in a worker who follows his trade honestly, etc. In the higher grades the work might be expanded to a consideration of the various professions.

The work should be conducted without regard to whether the students are rich or poor. The poor need the training in order to be able to lift themselves above their poverty-stricken conditions, and the rich need it in order to gain a respect for the followers of all occupations and an understanding of what constitutes skilled, honest work. The economic conditions of the country are sure to improve once a standard of skilled labor is established and given its right value, and this cannot be accomplished until employers and employees have attained a mutual understanding of the situation. Common training will give this understanding.

Along with the study of the industrial conditions and industrial vocations there should be developed emphasis on character building and the attitude toward work that must accompany such an undertaking. To accomplish the best results this phase should be carried on indirectly or incidentally with the main study. E-

positions on this subject have most force when given to the student in relation to the general study of this field; in other words the development of qualities of character or attitudes is essentially a part of all work and should not be treated as something separate. In connection with vocational and industrial studies the following topics should be developed:

1) a respect for and an appreciation of the dignity of all honest labor; an understanding that manual labor does not mean work of the hands alone, but work of both head and hands

2) a desire for honest workmanship

3) thrift

4) cooperation and service

5) the responsibilies and pride of ownership

It should be also pointed out that a good workman possesses and develops all these qualities:

1) responsibleness
2) industriousness
3) thoroughness
4) perseverance
5) orderliness
6) power of observation
7) initiative
8) ability to give instructions
9) independence
10) patience
11) accuracy
12) judgment
13) cleanliness

In order to leave to the teachers the decision as to what topics are best for their classes, the following list makes no definite assignment for the various classes. The teacher should read the entire list and select the ones that are best suited to his classes or prepare a similar list for his own use. The project method should be borne in mind in regard to this; that is, the teacher should select and organize a series of topics that will constitute a unit. The total number of themes devoted to the type of material indicated by this letter should be about one-half the total for the year. This list as first made may prove only tentative; after the plan proceeds, it may appear advisable to make alteration in the plan.

In many cases the teacher will find that in following a list of topics the students will not have sufficient information to write on these topics; this lack of information on these particular topics is the thing we are much concerned about. In such cases the teacher will have to supply the information; this informati

may be secured from free bulletins, magazines, etc. At present the teacher may collect whatever material is available for his use in this work. Further information on sources of material will be sent you later.

In order to get this information to the student, the period used for oral reports each week may be devoted to this work. Bulletins, etc. containing this information may be given to the various students who may then make their reports, the class being thereby supplied with the information. Like-wise, a very good plan is to have a brief round-table discussion with each student taking notes; such information may often be brought out in this manner. Furthermore, in connection with these discussions there should be developed the necessary vocabulary for writing the required theme. Cooperation with teachers of other Departments will make it possible to secure some of the material needed. (See General Course of Study, 1927, pp. 14-15.)

Obviously, the thing we hope to accomplish is to do something towards vocational guidance and towards informing the students on the opportunities that are available.

To summarize: By the subject matter chosen we hope to inject into the students' minds a certain body of information and a certain habit of attitude of thinking, one result of which will be the elimination from the students' minds that idea that culture and white collars are synomymous terms.

REPORTS TO BE MAILED TO
THE DEPARTMENT IN MAY (OPTIONAL)

A list of the topics used for the required themes would be greatly appreciated by the Department. This report is optional; however, in case you have worked out this year a series of theme topics which have proved especially successful in demonstrating the possibilities of organizing material into units of related theme topics, that information is very valuable and the Department would like to have it in order to pass it on so that others interested in the same work may profit thereby. Your cooperation will be greatly appreciated.

Very truly yours,

(Signed) Juan B. Huyke,
Commissioner of Education.

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TOPICS FOR THEMES

The following list of topics is only suggestive, as was explained heretofore; the teacher may revise the list in any way necessary in order to work out a composition project similar to the work indicated by these topics.

This list has been prepared thru the cooperation of various general superintendents who have given topics related to their field of work.

In order that the topics might be expressed clearly, it has been necessary in some cases to word them more fully than is required for a title of a theme; in such cases in order to convert the topics into titles, changes will have to be made. In some cases it may be possible to use the topics as the basis of a narrative; a small group of the topics are stated in a way to show narrative development.

1. How does a good workman show his intelligence and spirit in the care of his tools?

2. The work that
   a) a farmer, b) a shoemaker, c) a carpenter, or
   d) any other worker
   does that show his judgment, accuracy, perseverance, intelligence.

3. How does a good workman get speed into his work?

4. What is the relation between serviceability and beauty?

5. How can a workman estimate the price to be set on his service

6. How can a workman estimate the price to be set on something he has made?

7. What is meant by "budgeting"?

8. How should a workman budget his income?

9. Do you believe that "a half loaf is better than no loaf"?

10. What does thrift mean?

11. What are the opportunities that anPortorican laborer has for being thrifty?

12. What is meant by a "balanced diet"?

13. Explain the proverb, "Waste not, want not."

14. Saving for "a rainy day."

15. Saving for "a sunshiny day."

16. Choosing materials for dresses for school wear.

17. Choosing materials for a suit of clothes.

18. Choosing materials for a house.

19. Does Porto Rico have an influential middle class.?

20. What is the value of a garden?

21. Why have open windows at night?

22. Improving and keeping soil fertility.

23. Description of a trip to a farm.

24. Description of planting corn on the home farm.

25. Flower gardens _ ornamental shrubs.

26. How may milk and milk products be handled in a sanitary manner under local farm conditions?

27. How are plants propagated?

28. Importance of poultry and rabbit raising in your community.

29. Using native material for basket making.

30. Pottery making.

31. The different kinds of sugar cane.

32. Harvesting sugar cane.

33. Products and by_products of sugar cane.

34. Marketing the Porto Rican sugar.

35. Growing coffee.

36. Marketing coffee.

37. Growing tobacco.

38. Marketing tobacco.

39. Manual training and the development of character.

40. What can a boy who leaves school after the eighth grade do to earn money?

41. What can a boy do to earn money who leaves school after the twelfth grade? A girl?

42. What preparation is required to enter the profession of a doctor?

43. What preparation is required to enter the profession of a lawyer?

44. What preparation is required to enter the profession of a teacher?

45. What preparation is required to enter any other profession?

46. What opportunities does the profession of law offer in Porto Rico?

47. What opportunities does the profession of medicine offer in Porto Rico?

48. What opportunities does the profession of teaching offer in Porto Rico?

49. What opportunities does the business world offer to the young man? To the young woman?

50. What preparation is required of the person who wants a business career?

51. What are the wage scales in different parts of the world for skilled workers?

52. Unemployment in Porto Rico.

53. What has handicapedthe opening of industries in Porto Rico?

54. What materials are there in Porto Rico that could be used industrially?

55. Cigar making at present in Porto Rico.

56. Shirt factories.

57. Hat factories.

58. Needlework factories for women.

59. Why read a daily newspaper?

60 What kind of daily newspaper should one read?

61. Describe your favorite magazine.

62. Truck-farming.

63. Plant diseases (cane, fruit, trees, etc.).

64. Shoe factories.

65. Biographies of Portoricans who have accomplished much by agriculture and commerce.

66. Lives and achievements of men in Porto Rico who have furthered the progress of scientific agriculture.

67. Service rendered by Department of Agriculture.

68. Experiments stations for agriculture.

69. Insects that are pests.

70. Irrigation.

71. "Patronize home industries."

72. Can Porto Rico provide a substitute for codfish?

73. Can Porto Rico provide a substitute for rice?

74. Can Porto Rico grow its own beans?

75. Cheese-making as an industry.

76. Choosing a site for a house.

77. A modern kitchen.

78. Why does it help the man of the house for the kitchen to be modern?

79. Fuels for use in the kitchen?

80. How much money does Porto Rico have by having no winter?

81. Reforestration.

82. Birds and agriculture.

83. Clean parks.

84. Safety and traffic.

85. Fire prevention.

86. What does the word art mean?

87. Can a shoemaker be an artist?

88. Juan Fernandez, a poor boy attends high school; later he becomes mayor by putting on a comprehensive program of civic betterment, that won the support of the people engaged in th work of a vocational character. Write a story telling how he did it.

89. Ramona Sanchez, a high school girl, became rich by establis an embroidery and lace-making factory. Write a story traci her work from high school days up to the height of her succ

90. Manuel Perez, a high school graduate, has a big foundry co peting with Abarca and Porto Rico Iron Works. Write his s beginning with this first interest in foundry work in high school.

91. Write the story of a city boy who went to the country and learned the poultry business and made a success of it.

92. Write the story of a high school graduate who began a truck farm, and by applying what he had learned in agriculture mad a success of it.

93. A visit to the shops in the Baldorioty de Castro Technical S.

94. How to build a radio set.

95. How to make an electrical connection.

96. What are vocational course in high school?

97. Vocational training gives a man greater earning power, and

consequently makes possible greater leissure and opportunity for reading, study, and other pursuits of an advanced type.

98. What relation exists between women's clothing and art?

99. Are the latest fashions always advisable?

100. What textiles are advisable for a short, stout woman?

101. What textiles are advisable for a tall, thin girl?

102. Color in dress.

103. School uniform vs. the miscellaneous type of clothing for school wear.

104. Appropriate clothing for school wear.

105. Appropriate clothing for street wear.

106. Appropriate clothing for house wear.

107. Appropriate clothing for travelling.

108. Removal of stains.

109. Laundering.

110. Laundry in the home vs. laundry done outside the home.

111. Describe the arrangement and decoration of your ideal bedroom. (Don't spend too much money.)

112. Describe the arrangements and decoration of an ideal living-room. (Don't spend too much money).

113. Arrangements of rooms with relation to each other in order give the greatest convenience.

114. Convenience in the kitchen.

115. Storage space and closet room in a house.

116. Ready-made garments vs. home-made clothing.

117. Made-to-order garments vs. ready-made clothing.

118. Made-to-order garments vs. home-made clothing.

119. Importance of the teaching of home economics in the school.

120. Elective home economic courses.

121. Color in the infant's wardrobe.

122. Choice of shoes.

123. Ways of combating illitqracy in Porto Rico.

124. Improving Porto Rican needlework done for commercial purpose

125. Possibilities of machine embroidery.

126. What would the effect be on needlework if machine embroidery were introduced into the country?

127. Where in the school should machine embroidery be introduced?

128. Is the number of shops engaged in the production of embroidery for commercial purposes increasing or decreasing?

129. How does the U.S. tariff favor the Porto Rican handwork?

130. What factors must be taken into consideration before a budget can be made?

131. If a family of five has an income of $300, $500, $700, $900, $1000, or $1500, what should be percentages allowed to
a) food c) clothing e) recreation g) religion
b) shelter d) education f) savings h) higher li

132. Why should every person keep a budget?

133. A student's expenditures on the basis of an allowance.

134. Buying provisions at the market.

135. Cash buying versus time payments.

136. What are the signs indicating that a chicken or a fish is in good condition?

137. What are the various ways for preparing a chicken for cooki

138. What is the proper method of cutting up a chicken?

139. What factor lead to the high price of milk in Porto Rico?

140. What kind of cows are best suited to dairy purposes?

141. What are the qualities of good milk?

142. What are the sanitary regulations governing dairies?

143. Pasteurized milk.

144. Why should fruits and vegetables be included in the daily d

145. What possible occupations are there for girls and women in Porto Rico?

146. The biography of a woman in Porto Rico who owns and operate a fruit finca.

147. The biography of a woman in Porto Rico who own and operates a dairy?

148. Opportunities for women in the twentieth century contrasted with opportunities of the past century.

149. A detailed account of preparing dinner for Christmas Eve.

150. Eradicating cockroaches.